

Standard USHC-7: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the economic boom-and-bust in America in the 1920s and 1930s, its resultant political instability, and the subsequent worldwide response.

USHC-7.3 Explain the causes and effects of the social conflict and change that took place during the 1920s, including the role of women and their attainment of the right to vote, the “Red Scare” and the Sacco and Vanzetti case, the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, immigration quotas, Prohibition, and the Scopes trial. (H, P)

Taxonomy Level: 2.2 B Understanding/ Comprehension

Previous/future knowledge:

In the 5th grade, students were introduced to the racial and ethnic conflict of the 1920s (5-4.1).

In the 8th grade, they studied the causes and the effects of changes in South Carolina culture during the 1920s, including Prohibition and the revival of the Ku Klux Klan (8-6.4)

It is essential for students to know

Students must know that although the 1920s are often thought of as a care-free boom time, American society was divided by the trauma of change and not everyone experienced prosperity. The **social changes** were the result of industrialization, immigration and urbanization. By 1920, more than half of the American population lived in cities. The increasing emphasis on science and the experiences of the war years also contributed to social change. The result of these changes was often **social conflict** between traditional American conservatism and modern scientific liberalism.

The **role of women** changed somewhat during the 1920s. Women had taken new jobs while men were fighting, but many gave them up as soon as the soldiers returned. Having advocated for suffrage since the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 and winning it in many states (particularly in the West), women finally won the **right to vote** throughout the United States with the passage of the 19th amendment. However, women did not significantly make politics more moral as they had promised to do in their campaign for suffrage (Students do not generally understand the word suffrage, confusing it with suffering) and women most often voted as their husbands did. Women did not win new opportunities in the workplace and continued to be concentrated in the few occupations in which they had made inroads since the Civil War, as teachers, nurses, telephone operators and secretaries. They also continued to be employed as domestic servants, factory workers and sweatshop laborers. Working women made less money than their male counterparts. Movement to the cities during the war nurtured new sexual attitudes and aroused public anxiety about the decline of moral values. The iconic image of the flapper represented this change but posed little threat to the traditional roles of wife and mother.

The propaganda of ‘100 percent Americanism’ during the war years exacerbated traditional American nativism and turned it into xenophobia. In the postwar period, high inflation, competition from returning veterans and the end of wartime concessions to workers led to labor unrest. Strikes frightened middle and upper class Americans as did the growing socialist movement in Europe. Anarchist bombs exploded in eight American cities in 1919. Fear caused by workers’ strikes, bolshevism and bombs led to a **Red Scare**. The United States Attorney General [A. Mitchell Palmer] hoped to gain public support for a bid for the presidency in 1920. In a series of raids which came to be known as the Palmer Raids, the federal government under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, arrested 4,000 alleged communists who were held without bond. Later 600 were deported. Palmer predicted a series of anarchist attacks that did not materialize and he was discredited, but not before arousing feeling against dangerous foreigners. This new wave of nativism was furthered by the trial of Italian immigrants **Sacco and Vanzetti**. These avowed anarchists were accused of robbing an armored car and killing a guard. Their case became a

cause celebre among liberals and civil rights advocates who claimed they were being prosecuted for their immigrant status and radical views. Although the prosecution had clearly not made the case against them, they were convicted and executed. Historical evidence indicates that they were most likely guilty.

Anti-immigrant sentiment became part of the rationale for a **resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan** in the 1920s. In 1915, the movie *The Birth of a Nation* aroused racist sentiments against African Americans. The Red Scare and the Sacco and Vanzetti case added radicals, immigrants and Catholics to the list of groups targeted by the new Klan. The business climate of the 1920s also contributed to the Klan's resurgence as they used advertising and business organization to promote membership. It was a national organization with a strong following in the small towns and cities of the Midwest as well as in the South. Seeing themselves as a moral regulators, Klansmen targeted bootleggers and gamblers with cross burnings, public beatings and lynching. However, Klan leaders involved in sex scandals and corruption undermined these claims to moral leadership and the Klan faded from public view. A comparison of the Klan of the 1920s with the Klan of the Reconstruction period would help students to better understand the nature of each.

As anti-immigrant sentiment turned to xenophobia, it also resulted in the passage of **immigration quotas** in the National Origins Act of 1924. This had been a goal of conservatives since the end of the 19th century and was supported by arguments based on Social Darwinism and Anglo Saxon superiority. Immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe was severely limited and Asians were barred entirely. This was a continuation of limitations on immigration from Asia of the 19th century [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882].

As a result of anti-German sentiment and grain shortages during the war years, the temperance movement, which had been advocating **prohibition** in order to preserve American culture in the face of immigration since the 1830s, was finally successful on a national scale. The 18th amendment prohibited the sale and distribution of alcohol, but not its consumption. Compliance was often a matter of class, ethnic background and religious affiliation. Soon illegal sources were filling the demand and speakeasies proliferated in cities and ethnic communities. Neither the federal nor the local governments had the manpower to stop this illegal trade or the organized crime that grew as a result of the bootlegging business. The 21st amendment passed in 1933 repealed the 18th amendment and ended prohibition.

Conflict between traditional religious beliefs and science also caused anxiety in the 1920s. A revival movement at the beginning of the century led to the development of religious fundamentalism which believed in the literal truth of the Bible. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution challenged that belief. The **Scopes Trial**, also known as the Monkey Trial, was the result of a Tennessee state law that forbade the teaching of evolution in public schools. A young biology teacher purposefully defied the law in order to bring a test case, was arrested and defended by the American Civil Liberties Union. The clash of two famous lawyers, Clarence Darrow for the defense and William Jennings Bryan for the state, resolved nothing. Although the teacher was fined, both sides believed that they had won the argument that continues to this day.

The conflict between social conservatives who advocate conformity to a traditional moral code and liberals who advocate individual rights took place in the 1920s and continues today. Students should understand the positions of both conservatives and liberals in the 1920s.

It is not essential for students to know:

Students do not need to know about the sexual revolution of the 1920s or the role of Margaret Sanger in the birth control movement. They do not need to know about the various organizations that supported the right of women to vote or the leadership and various strategies and tactics used to achieve it. They need

not know that the women's movement split over support for the Equal Rights Amendment advocated by Alice Paul nor that the women's suffrage movement evolved into the League of Women Voters. Students do not need to know about the campaign against radicalism during the war or the subsequent jailing of Eugene Debs for speaking out against the war. They do not need to remember that Debs ran for the presidency on the socialist ticket from jail. However they may remember Debs for his role in the Pullman strike during the 1890s (USHC 5.4). They do not need to know about the strikes sponsored by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). They do not need to know the details of the post war strikes such as the police officers strike that brought Calvin Coolidge to national attention.

It is not necessary for students to know the details of the sex scandals that led to the decline in popularity of the Klan. Students do not need to know the evolution of the movement for immigration restriction or that the original bill was amended later to make it more restrictive. They need not know that Henry Cabot Lodge led the campaign for its passage or associate immigration restriction with the Republican Party. Students do not need to know the details of the organized crime that developed in the 1920s as a result of prohibition or the details of bootlegging and bathtub gin. They need not know that journalists saw bootleggers deliver to the Harding White House. They need not know that there was also a campaign to outlaw smoking and the use of tobacco during the 1920s. Students do not need to know the details of the Scopes trial or that Clarence Darrow tried to embarrass William Jennings Bryan by putting him on the witness stand and grilling him on his belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible. They need not know that Bryan was a four time presidential candidate but they should remember him from his role in the 1896 presidential campaign (USHC 5.3). They need not know that Bryan died five days after the trial ended.

Assessment guidelines:

Appropriate assessments will require students to **explain** the conflicts between tradition and modernity that marked the 1920s. Students should be able to **summarize, classify** and identify **examples** of the important cultural changes that impacted women and immigrants in the era. Students should be able to **compare** the impact of social conflict and change on various groups within the United States. They should be able to **interpret** maps, graphs, photographs and political cartoons and **infer** their relationship to information about the time period. Students should be able to **interpret** the significance of each of the listed incidents and **infer** its impact on American democracy.